

TESTIMONY OF THE CAROL ATEN:
ZONING COMMISSION 22-RT1, September 22, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Carol Aten and I live in Ward 3 where we have a history of redlining and restrictive covenants and a dearth of affordable housing.

Washington, DC has a lot of bad history to make up for when it comes to racial equity, including recent history. This new requirement for the Zoning Commission and other DC agencies to consider their decisions through a racial equity lens has the potential to break the “business as usual” inequity-perpetuating results that have long occurred. However, in order for the Zoning Commission to play it’s part in remedying the past wrongs and address inappropriate racial disparities, it will need to be informed and act intentionally with an activist posture.

Frankly, the questions submitted for public review don’t even come close to providing the information the Zoning Commission will need to make decisions, let alone include any mechanisms to address identified problems such as displacement. The following items must be included in the approach taken and the Commission will likely need to work with the Office of Planning for information and expertise.

Take Responsibility: The Zoning Commission must accept that this is their responsibility and include the process for evaluating racial equity and possible actions they should order in their regulations as text amendments.

Get Data: It is fine for the Zoning Commission to ask developers to provide information to help inform their decisions, but the Commission must take the responsibility for doing the necessary analysis and must obtain the necessary data to do that.

Take Action: The Zoning Commission should identify specific remedies that it can impose to address inequities while also letting developers and map and text amendment proposers voluntarily include such remedies.

Monitor Outcomes: It will be important to see if what is being done is working or needs to change and be improved.

We are all (belatedly) feeling our way in addressing something that is a long-standing problem. The recent amendments to the Comprehensive Plan have created an impetus. We must rise to this challenge. We are not alone; other jurisdictions have also been grappling with this issue and have been much more aggressive. Washington, DC should not only follow their lead but become the leader.

Thank you for initiating this conversation through this Roundtable. The results are crucial to the future of the city.

